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## Local News

# Local tobacco production expected to increase

By MISTY MAYNARD

Tuesday, April 3, 2007 6:06 PM EDT

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Many tobacco farmers in Mason County and across the state intend to increase tobacco production this year.

Nationwide, the increase in tobacco growth is expected to be about 4 percent, according to information from the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association, while the state of Kentucky is expected to increase production about 5.5 percent.

As of now, the increase is "speculation," according to Mason County Extension Agent Bill Peterson. Until the crop is planted, specific increases will not be known. However, the BTGCA announced the increase, which was reflected in the March 30 Prospective Plantings Report from the National Agricultural Statistics Service.



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In Kentucky, tobacco acreage is expected to increase from 73,000 acres in 2006 to 77,000 acres this year. Ohio production is expected to remain stable, and Missouri is expected to increase 7 percent, according to information from BTGCA. Estimates for two other states in the cooperative, Indiana and West Virginia, were not available.

Locally, tobacco farmer Anthony Wenz said he intends to increase the amount of tobacco he will grow. Wenz said he averaged about 20,000 pounds the last few years, but plans to grow 25,000 pounds this year. Part of his decision to do so was made because he has a nephew who is old enough to grow tobacco and would like to have a crop.

Wenz said when the price support system and federal production controls ended in 2004, he was not sure how the sale of tobacco would be handled.

With that bit of uncertainty, Wenz said he and his family discussed production and decided to only raise as much as they could handle, without resorting to hiring outside labor. Wenz said he did not want to invest in housing facilities for migrant workers without knowing how profitable the tobacco industry would be in coming years.

Now that a few years have passed, Wenz said most people have been pleased with the big tobacco companies and the way the companies have lived up to their deals.

Still, the amount of tobacco the raised is within the family's capabilities, Wenz said, so labor concerns did not play a role in deciding to raise 5,000 more pounds of tobacco.

Wenz said for some tobacco farmers, labor was an issue, as well as the availability of barns or curing structures.

Roger Quarles, president of the BTCGA, said he was not surprised by the increase in tobacco production in Kentucky and the region.

"This region produces the highest quality tobacco in the world," he said.

Quarles credited successful BTGCA programs for part of the expansion, noting the organization spent more than \$4.6 million on the Tobacco Infrastructure Improvement Program in 2006 to partner with growers to make improvements on their operations.

According to information from the cooperative, "the BTGCA is sponsoring labor services through its subsidiary Commodity Growers Cooperative." The program, according to information provided, has helped more than 80 growers hire more than 600 temporary migrant workers to help produce this year's crop.

Accounting for all tobacco types, according to information, tobacco acreage in Kentucky is expected to increase to 88,500, with includes an increase in dark-fired tobacco as well as an increase in dark-air cured tobacco.

Contact Misty Maynard at 606-564-9091, ext. 274.

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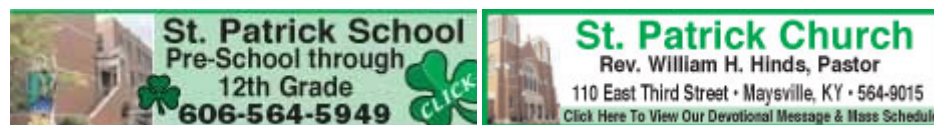
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